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EDITORIAL EXTRACTS FAVORING AND SUGGESTING REASONS FOR THE

APPOINTMENT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION BY THE REGENTS
OF THE UNIVERSITY.

[Editorial from *New York Times*, 12 August 1894]

THE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

There is one subject with which the constitutional convention should deal with courage and decision, if it does anything with it, and that is the unification of the educational system of the state, by vesting the appointment of the superintendent of public instruction in the regents of the University. By thus removing the choice of the superintendent from the field of partisan political contention it would be possible to secure the services in that office of higher-minded and more capable men and (of almost equal consequence) to retain such a man so long as his efficiency, pertinent to the duties of the office, should continue at high-water mark.

The present method of choosing superintendents by the legislature, once in three years, makes political considerations decide the original choice, and is sure to turn out the experienced officer at the end of his official term if the opposing political party is then in the ascendancy.

All parties should agree to take the educational system of the state out of politics. There is plenty of room elsewhere for political contention. Let us all unite in placing the schools of the state, from the kindergarten to the university, under the scientific supervision and unselfish care of the regents of the University, who are high-minded men, devoting their time and services to the cause of education, asking and receiving no compensation for their labors and anxious only to promote as best may be the enlightenment and elevation of the people at large.

The constitutional convention can do nothing that will more widely commend its work to the people of this state, of all shades of political belief, than thus to safeguard the best interests of the public schools of all grades.

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[[Editorial from *New York Tribune*, 12 August 1894]

THE CONVENTION AND THE SCHOOLS

The proposal that the power and duty of appointing the superintendent of public instruction in this state shall be transferred from the legislature to the regents of the University is supported by strong arguments. The advocates of this change, whose sincerity and disinterestedness can not possibly be suspected, have reason to hope that the constitutional convention will adopt their views, but since its time is limited and its work heavy, a preliminary discussion of the subject may be helpful.

All judicious supporters of the educational establishment of this state are doubtless agreed that it ought to be absolutely secured against political manipulation, and therefore that it ought, if possible, to be entirely outside the field of political contention. So far as the powers of the regents extend, that object has been already happily accomplished. It is solely with the desire and intention of carrying out this principle still further that an extension of their powers in the way proposed is now urged. Under the existing system the choice of a superintendent of public instruction is inevitably influenced by political considerations. The fact that the unfortunate possibilities of the present method of selection have hitherto been generally avoided is not a sufficient argument for its retention, if a different method would almost certainly afford a stronger guarantee of efficiency in that important office and of popular confidence in the incumbent. Those who have carefully considered the plan of vesting the appointment of the superintendent in the regents of the University are convinced that the change would be permanently beneficial. It is said truly that while by the conditions of their existence and organization the regents represent both parties in the sense that they are chosen from both parties, and must continue to do so, they are nevertheless as far removed from the sway of personal or political prejudices as any official body however constituted could be; that during the whole period of their history they have never shown a desire for increased power or patronage, and that the only argument for the proposed change to which they would listen for a moment is to be found in the belief that it would enable them to serve the state by unifying and strengthening its educational system.

The regents hold office for life without salary, and the natural expectation that officials appointed to discharge a sacred trust on those terms would cherish no other ambition than that of promoting the common welfare within their sphere has been confirmed by experience. The people of this state have an immense interest in the educational branch of the public service, and are more and more conscious of that fact every year. They will certainly be prepared to ratify any measure for increasing the efficiency of the schools so soon as they are convinced of its merits. That

the purpose of this proposal to lift the office of superintendent entirely above the range of party strife is as sure as it is deserving of their sympathy no one can doubt, and we believe that the method suggested will commend itself to their approval, as we hope it may to the judgment of the constitutional convention.

[From editorial of *Niagara Falls Cataract* concerning the proposed appointment of the superintendent of public instruction by the regents of the University]

Much might be said in favor of the suggested change. The board is a more permanent body than the legislature, is freer from political entanglements; and is in closer touch with all matters educational, dealing as it does with such subjects only. Any appointments they might make would, in their own interests, necessarily be dictated rather by a desire to secure a competent and capable man than by any desire to serve party or party ends.

[Editorial from *New York Morning Advertiser*, 8 August 1894]

The movement inaugurated by the teachers of the high schools of the state to have the superintendent of public instruction appointed by the board of regents is one that deserves encouragement and should receive the careful attention of the constitutional convention. The educational committee has had the matter before it for some time, but consideration of it is being too long deferred. The present method of appointment — by joint ballot of the legislature — is one which passes this important office over to the control of politicians. The salary attached is \$5,000. This is a bone worth picking, and it sets the pack to quarreling. Of late there has been no influence in the state that could prevail against the personal wishes of Lieutenant-Governor Sheehan in this matter, and that fact of itself is sufficient to show the danger which lies in the present method. The superintendent of public instruction exerts a tremendous influence on all the educational institutions of the state from the kindergarten to the university, and it is not pleasant to know that the entire public-school system might be so readily Sheehanized. The regents are nineteen in number, holding office for life, and the board, including as it does the governor, lieutenant-governor and secretary of state, is, we take it, much better qualified to select the superintendent of public instruction than William F. Sheehan individually.

[Editorial from *Harper's Weekly*, 14 July 1894]

AN EDUCATIONAL REFORM

It is understood that a proposition to vest the election of the superintendent of public instruction in the regents of the University is considered favorably by the committee on education of the New York constitutional convention, and will in due time be reported to that body for its action. It is auspicious, both for the character of the proposition and the prospects of its incorporation in the organic law, that it will proceed from the committee with substantial unanimity. In the convention it will be advocated by leading delegates of both parties, and there can be no question of its adoption and submission to the people.

Its inspiration is obvious, and that in the desire of intelligent friends of education to relieve, so far as practicable, the conduct of its various systems from political influences. There is, of course, no department of government that should be so free from partisan inclination as that of education, and yet it is to the reproach of New York, which in many respects has conserved admirably the educational interests of her people, that she has permitted too much of the evil indicated to obtain, and that specially in the management of her elementary schools. This is true of city boards, too often the creatures of ward caucuses, of county commissioners quite as often the makeshifts of convention compromises, and of the superintendent of public instruction, chosen almost uniformly for his skill as a manipulator of votes rather than for his worth as an educator. That some of the officials thus evolved have become superior to the method of their production is certainly to their credit, but the method has endured with the lax or dictatorial supervision, the incompetent subordinates with credentials from local bosses, and the tendency to subordinate educational weal to political behests which it involves. A drastic reform would at once resolve the elective into the appointive scheme, with lengthened tenures and removals for cause, but this would probably be so repugnant to the democratic sentiment of the commonwealth, fortified as it is by the generally beneficent operation of the constitution of 1846, as to render it inexpedient and impracticable, but a movement in the right direction may be made by taking the department of public instruction from the domain of party politics.

There is no need to rehearse the story of how this supreme and sacred trust has been time and again abused and degraded, or how those who have held it have been fashioned by the machinery of party, and have in turn constructed machines for personal profit and partisan aggrandizement. It is a story as familiar as lamentable. The evil should be summarily remedied, and that remedy may be applied by the convention at the request of the committee.

HOW CAN THE SYSTEM OF EDUCATION IN THIS STATE BE IMPROVED ?

The attention of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention is respectfully called to the considerations and arguments advanced in the following pages, as suggesting an answer to this most important question.

The committee suggests nothing revolutionary concerning the functions of the department. They will not be disturbed. Neither its authority is to be abridged, its jurisdiction limited, nor its constitution changed. Its head will still be the head of the common-school system, invested with all the powers — and they are very considerable — that he now possesses. He will not be the servant of the regents; he will be the master within his own sphere, although in deriving his commission from them he will be likely to act in harmony with them. Friction between the elementary and higher branches of education, which has sometimes occurred, will thus be avoided, and this is most desirable. There should be harmony between the two, but this does not imply either the persuasion or propriety of unification, even if it were attainable, which at present it probably is not, delicate and perplexing as would be the adjustments required, and determined against it as are the convictions of many who have given it serious thought. It is not proposed to vary or to modify a single feature of existing systems of education.

The new departure is simply as to the mode of election. The regents are the most convenient, conservative, and serviceable agents in whom to confide such election, while still preserving the integrity and independence of public-school administration.

It is not essential in this connection to review the work which the regents have done through the century of their being, nor to emphasize the opportunities for still larger usefulness which recent legislation has afforded them, but it is true that their composition, their disposition, and their usages would be the assurance that through them politics would be eliminated in the selection of the superintendent, who would be chosen in the same manner and for the same term as is the secretary of the board. The regents have, indeed, been elected by the same body, viz, the legislature, as have the superintendent and United States senators, but membership in the board, with the life tenure attached to it and non-compensated service, has informed them with a dignity and a sense of responsibility inconsistent with political bias in their official action. This is in the nature of things. It commends itself *a priori*, but it is also justified historically. Some fresh illustrations are notably pertinent. Four years ago George William Curtis was unanimously elected chancellor by a board which was almost wholly opposed to him politically, but he was by his eminence as a scholar, and his long and distinguished career as a regent, entitled to the distinction, which was freely bestowed. Upon his death another scholar was preferred as his successor, and William Croswell Doane, who had but a year previously been elected a regent by a democratic legislature, was made vice-chancellor. In the selection of its secretaries and clerical force the board has always been equally solicitous that its appointments should be significant of their educational and effective quality, and not of their political affiliations. So it would appear that the regents may safely be trusted to

choose the superintendent, and that thus that official may be preferred by educational standards. These are the proper standards, and thus far no better nor no more rational plan has been outlined than that the regents should enforce them.

[Editorial from *Buffalo Express*, 24 June 1894]

REGENTS WORK AND POLITICS

The amendment before the constitutional convention proposing to make the superintendent of public instruction a subordinate of the board of regents would do away with the existing inconsistencies consequent upon a dual system of supervising education. It is difficult to see how it would injure the power or opportunities of a good superintendent, or how, with the board composed as it is, it would be a dangerous step for the state. If it would tend to bring the regents, who are appointed for life, more into politics, it would not be so desirable. But with a superintendent chosen as under present conditions, merely because he is the henchman of a boss, it will be hard to make the public believe that a change making him a subordinate would be an injury to the interests of education.

[Editorial from *The Sun*, 14 August 1894]

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

Among the thousands of college graduates who are inhabitants of the Empire State there are but few who could, offhand, give a correct answer to the question: What is the University of the State of New York? Yet the question is well worth answering, for under that title we possess an institution of remarkable administrative capabilities of utility which, if not absolutely unique, is only paralleled in France, and approached within a certain distance by the London University.

The history of the University of the State of New York is bound up with that of the commonwealth, with which it is nearly coeval. Organized in 1784, it had for its first Chancellor GEORGE CLINTON, while DE WITT CLINTON was its third Secretary; and ALEXANDER HAMILTON and JOHN JAY were among its first and most active regents. The "University" is a supervisory and administrative, not a teaching, institution. It is a State department, and at the same time a federation of over five hundred institutions of higher and secondary education. Like other States, New York has a department of public instruction in charge of elementary schools, but no other State has a department devoted to the interests of education higher than that which may be classed as elementary.

Considered as a State department, the "University"—we use quotation marks to distinguish it from the meaning usually attached to the term—unites various educational functions elsewhere scattered or entirely unprovided for, and exercises unusual powers. Though most of its work is executive, yet in granting charters to all educational institutions, it performs functions usually discharged only by Legislatures. On the other hand, in revoking charters and dissolving educational corporations, it exercises the judicial functions of a court. Its examination department embraces not only the functions of the local examinations of Oxford and Cambridge, and of the University of London, but also the State licensing of physicians, and other work peculiar to itself.

Its extension department corresponds to the similar departments of Oxford and Cambridge and of the London Society for the Extension of University Teaching. Its State library and State museum departments not only have custody of collections, among the most important in the United States, but also conduct work allied to that of the English science and art department of the British Museum, and of the London Natural History Museum.

Regarded as a federation, the University of the State of New York reminds one of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, each of which represents a union of colleges; but in respect of comprehensiveness it differs from these, because it includes all the colleges, academies and institutions for higher education within the bounds of the commonwealth. The law gives to incorporated institutions no option as to their membership in the University. It says:

"The institutions of the University shall include all institutions of higher education (the term 'higher' here is construed to embrace what is generally termed secondary) which are now or may be hereafter incorporated in this State, and such other libraries, museums, or other institutions for higher education as may, in conformity with the ordinances of the regents, after official inspection, be admitted to or incorporated by the University."

This means that no educational establishments except those of a relatively elementary order, which fall under the authority of the Department of Public Instruction, can have a legal existence in New York without being subject to the regulations and entitled to the privileges provided by the University.

The University of the State of New York conserves the advantages of individual initiative, while extending the benefits of system, of harmony, of coworking in the various members of the educational body, and of organic connection with State life. The organization most closely resembling it is that of the University of France, as devised by the first Napoleon in 1808, twenty-four years after that of the State of New York had been put in operation.

[Editorial from *Troy Press*, 11 August, 1894.]

KEEP THE SCHOOLS UNDEFILED.

The constitutional convention, as we have previously suggested, should vest the appointment of the Superintendent of Public Instruction in the Regents of the University of the State of New York. — *New York Advertiser*.

The question of harmonizing the two departments of education in the State of New York has been one which has caused a great deal of thought on the part of leaders in educational thought in this state for several years. All sorts of suggestions have been made. Many of the practical politicians urge that the regents of the University of the State of New York be abolished, or put under the control of the department of public instruction. But this wish seems to be confined to the politicians or those who have not given the question particular attention. The true friends of education, of advanced education in this state — and we are glad to see the *Advertiser* taking a determined stand on this ground — are appreciative of the grand work accomplished by the regents, and are mindful of the wonderful progress made by that body in the care of the higher schools and academies during the past few years, especially since the reorganization of that institution. This phase of the question is one which has been discussed frequently in this paper and we do not propose to touch upon it here. The immediate point at issue is whether the department of public instruction shall dominate.

The present superintendent of public instruction has taken occasion during his terms of office to ridicule the University of the State of New York and the work of its executive officers. An attempt has been made to belittle the principle on which the institution has stood for a century, as well as to cast discredit upon its workings. The stand taken by the enemies of the University is indefensible, from our standpoint. The foremost educators of the country, and some of the greatest educators of Europe, repeatedly have commended the regents for the work accomplished by the University in recent years, and the University stands to-day as the peer of any educational institution or system in the world.

For years the department of public instruction was kept out of politics. The University always has been kept out of politics, and ever will be free from contamination of that character, so long as its cardinal principles remain unaltered and its executive officers continue to be anywhere near the standard of the present staff. The department of public instruction, on the contrary, has been brought into politics. We do not pretend to state the whys and wherefores, but that it has been placed where it is dominated, to a certain extent, by politicians, none will attempt to refute.

It is against this domination that the friends of education in this state are defending the regents of the University. And it is with this principle of complete autonomy on the part of the educational bureau in view that

we advocate exactly what the *Advertiser* does — that the appointment of the superintendent of public instruction should be vested in the regents of the University. This would take the department entirely out of politics, and we can see no other present way in which this most desirable end is to be accomplished. Partisan politics is the bane of education wherever it obtains even partial control. Such power should be throttled wherever it manifests itself, instantly and without mercy. No branch of our public service is so close to the people as that of public education; and it is becoming more sacred year by year. Had the citizens of the state known the true status of affairs or its possibilities, the change proposed would have been effected the last previous time the constitution was revised.

The interest in the matter was never greater than now, and it is increasing. Year by year the eyes of the people are opened wider and wider, and the demand for the protection of public education from political partisanship becomes stronger and stronger. With public sentiment as it is to-day there is little room for doubt that the action of the constitutional convention in making the change suggested would be emphatically endorsed by the people if they were called upon to settle the question with their votes next fall.

[Extracts from Editorial in *The Outlook*, 18 August, 1894.]

* * * If in our educational systems there is one principle more than another to be insisted upon, it is that schools should be totally dissociated from politics. The present issue in New York state has its lessons for the educational system in every other state in the Union. * * *

Now as to the dual system. The superintendent of public instruction, elected by a joint ballot of the legislature, generally owes his election to political influence. The regents controlling higher education are twenty-three in number; they are elected in the same manner as are United States senators, and they serve without salary. The present board is composed of the most eminent citizens of the state, and instead of enlarging the political power of the superintendent of public instruction we need rather to enlarge the economical, essential, and non-partisan work of the board of regents. * * *

The fortunes of politics affect our school officers from the superintendent down. Instead of reforming higher education, we need rather to look at the incompetency of elementary instruction. * * *

Instead of abolishing the board of regents, we would give them power to elect the superintendent of public instruction, and would make him amenable to them. A body over which George Clinton, John Jay, George William Curtis, and Anson Judd Upson have presided would surely prove at least as desirable electors of a superintendent as would any partisan legislature. The regents would choose a man without the slightest regard to political affiliations, and with some regard to fitness for his work. This plan was unanimously approved at the recent meeting of the University Convocation, the most largely attended ever held, which voted to memorialize the constitutional convention to provide for the recognition in the constitution of the board of regents as a constituent part of the organic structure of the commonwealth, and to confer upon it the power to elect the superintendent of public instruction of the state.

[Editorial from *Rome Daily Sentinel*, 15 August, 1894.]

UNIFY THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM.

If the constitutional convention does any thing to the educational system, let it unify the office of superintendent of public instruction in the regents of the University. A critic of the subject of the State system of education well says: "Let us all unite in placing the schools of the state, from the kindergarten to the University, under the scientific supervision and unselfish care of the regents of the University, who are high-minded men, devoting their time and services to the cause of education, asking and receiving no compensation for their labors, and anxious only to promote as best may be the enlightenment and elevation of the people at large."

The unification would be desirable if for no other reason than that of the equableness and progress guaranteed by having all affairs germane to one department, kept under that department. But the fact that the office of superintendent of public instruction is political is strongly additional reason for the consolidation. Every three years the legislature elects the superintendent, and there is partisan contention over the office.

The political considerations likely to govern the original choice are not such as tend to secure the services of high-minded and capable men. If after three years the opposing political party is in the ascendancy, an experienced officer is sure to be turned out. And so it goes. Capacity in the first place, and the retention of the cumulative experience of the officer, the two vital principles of successful administration, cannot be obtained under the present system. Let the office cease to be a political foot-ball.

[Editorial from the *New York Times*, 21 August, 1894.]

THE REGENTS AND THE SCHOOLS.

A few days ago the *Times* pointed out the advantages that would accrue to the State by the unification of the system of public instruction by a system under which the superintendent should be appointed by the Regents of the University.

There can be no doubt that this management is theoretically much more eligible than that which now exists, under which secondary and higher education, so far as the State has to do with it, is administered by the Board of Regents, and primary instruction by the Superintendent. The regents are chosen by the Legislature as vacancies occur in their body, and each party makes a point of putting forward some man whom it desires to honor on account of his scholarship. As a matter of fact, the system has worked very well indeed in securing men of high character and standing.

A real and valuable tradition has been established, and a body of men assembled the imposition upon whom of any duties pertaining to public instruction would command the public confidence beforehand. The only complaint that has ever been made about the body is that its duties are not very important. On the one hand, here is an advisory board capable of supervising and administering public instruction so as to command the public confidence. On the other, here is the desirableness, admitted by every thoughtful citizen of the State, that the public school system should be taken out of politics. What could be more obvious, and, now that a Constitutional Convention is sitting, more easy, than to symmetrize our whole system of public instruction by intrusting to the Regents the appointment of the Superintendent?

Theoretical anomalies do not much distress ordinary Americans. So long as an incongruous system worked well and was not attacked, there was no good reason why it should be changed. But the present Superintendent of Public Instruction has had the very bad judgment to call attention to the incongruity of the system and to propose that the incongruity be removed. He did this by recommending that his own office should be magnified by adding to it the functions heretofore exercised by the Regents. But, to people who consider the case, that is an impossible solution. The chances are very great that a Superintendent appointed under the present system will be a politician and will owe his place to political influence. In fact, the present Superintendent is an object lesson as to that danger.

Even if he happened, against all the chances, to be a competent and faithful Superintendent, he would be in imminent danger of removal whenever the party opposed to his own controlled the Legislature at the expiration of his term, and the State would at once lose the benefit of his

experience. If he were appointed by the Regents, his appointment would be as far removed from politics as can be expected of any State appointment. So far as we know or believe, the Board of Regents is as free from political control as any body of public servants in the State — as the Court of Appeals, for example. We do not believe that the politics of a candidate for Superintendent would cut any figure in the discussion or the consideration of his appointment by that body. We believe the election would be decided solely by what appeared to be his fitness for the place.

This would be an immense and obvious improvement over the present system. In the first place, the chances are overwhelmingly against the choice being decided by the unrestricted judgment of the Legislature, or the majority of it, as to the fitness of a candidate; in the second place, the chances are overwhelmingly against the Legislature's being so good a judge as the Regents upon the fitness of a candidate for this particular place.

[From "A new constitution for New York," in *Review of Reviews*, March, 1894]

EDUCATIONAL REFORMS

There is no public matter that lies in reality so close to the hearthstone of every family in New York as that of the proper provision for education, so that a wise and practical intelligence for citizenship and for self-support may be brought within the reach of the children of every household. What can this convention do to improve the school system of New York and for education in general?

The opportunity is given to this convention to place the entire educational system of the state, from the primary school to its colleges and universities, under a thoroughly competent and representative state authority, and to prohibit interference by the legislature or by local officers in the sphere particularly reserved to the science of education. The board of regents of the University of the State of New York is a body which, although its powers have been enlarged within two years, has never yet had that opportunity of doing effective work which so representative and important a body of men should have.

"I submit that in states where there is a state university governed by regents, the educational departments of the state ought to be placed under their administration and thus kept out of the political powers and free from the dangers which would entail were it committed to their hands. This is one of the most decided advantages for the system in the state of New York, and is in itself strong enough to overbalance almost all other considerations."—WILLIAM WARREN POTTER, M. D. in a paper read at the annual conference of state medical examining and licensing boards, Milwaukee, Wis., June 7, 1893

[Editorial from *The Mail and Express*, 20 August 1894]

SCHOOL REFORM AND IMPROVEMENT.

Argument ought not be necessary to fix public sentiment in favor of the reform in the educational department of the State which has been proposed to the Constitutional Convention, and probably it is not.

The change proposed is that the Superintendent of Public Instruction shall be elected by the Regents of the University and be responsible to them for the faithful and competent discharge of his duties. At present the Superintendent, who is elected by the Legislature, has charge of the elementary schools, while the Regents exercise some supervision of the higher institutions.

The office of Superintendent has become a political prize. James F. Crooker, its present occupant, was formerly a resident of Buffalo, and was chosen simply and solely because William F. Sheehan named him. It is too much to expect that a Superintendent, chosen under such auspices, would be satisfactory to the real friends of the public schools.

With in fact two departments of education, each independent of the other, there is constant danger of friction. Mr. Crooker has suggested that this can be avoided and the educational department of the State government harmonized and unified by the abolition of the Regents of the University and the placing of the powers and expenditures in his hands. But this would mean the further involvement of our schools in politics, and they are too much involved already.

The Board of Regents consists of the following eminent citizens :

Martin I. Townsend, LL. D., Troy; Anson Judd Upson, D. D., LL. D., Glens Falls; William L. Bostwick, M. A., Ithaca; Chauncey M. Depew, LL. D., New York; Charles E. Fitch, M. A., Rochester; Orris H. Warren, D. D., Syracuse; Whitelaw Reid, LL. D., New York; William H. Watson, M. D., Utica; Henry E. Turner, Lowville; St. Clair McKelway, LL. D., Brooklyn; Hamilton Harris, LL. D., Albany; Daniel Beach, LL. D., Watkins; Willard A. Cobb, M. A., Lockport; Carroll E. Smith, Syracuse; Pliny T. Sexton, LL. D., Palmyra; T. Guilford Smith, M. A., C. E., Buffalo; William C. Doane, D. D., LL. D., Albany; Lewis A. Stimson, M. D., New York; Sylvester Malone, Brooklyn.

These gentlemen, who are distinguished for their ability in their professions and who were selected for their sympathy in the broadest sense with the public school system, hold office for life. Politics has no place in their deliberations. They represent all sections of the State. If the public schools were entirely under their control, there would be immediate and valuable improvement in these schools. Politics would be completely eliminated from the State's work of education. The teachers would be selected for their ability and would not depend for their places on the success of one political faction or another. Incompetent and ignorant persons would not, as they do now, get situations through political influence.

The incongruity of two departments of education is admitted on all sides and it ought not to be longer tolerated in our State. The fitter should survive and control. The other should be abolished or merged in the better one. The consolidation would provide for superintendence and take the public schools entirely out of politics.

[Editorial from *New York Tribune*, 23 August, 1894.]

THE REGENTS AND THE SCHOOLS.

The proposed amendment to the constitution transferring the appointment of the Superintendent of Public Instruction from the Legislature to the Regents of the University is under consideration by the Committee on Education. Approval of this proposition has been so general as to suggest the probability of favorable action by the convention in case the committee shall recommend the change. We hope that it will have that advantage. An open discussion of its merits is likely, we think, to be convincing to disinterested persons who may not have given much thought to the subject hitherto. Certainly the advocates of the proposal are governed only by a desire to promote the efficiency of the schools, and their argument is a strong one.

No reputable citizen of New York wants to have the selection of the Superintendent influenced in the slightest degree by political considerations. But, human nature being what it is, it is impossible under the present method of appointment to escape such influences altogether. A legislature is either Republican or Democratic, and its bias is always liable to be disclosed in the dismissal of a Superintendent who ought to be retained or the retention of a Superintendent who ought to be dismissed. Every three years the schools of the State are subjected to this danger, and the fact that they may escape it for a considerable period does not justify the risk.

The Regents constitute a permanent body, removed by the terms of its official existence as far as possible from the influence of narrow and selfish considerations. They have never asked for an extension of their powers and patronage, and have no motive for incurring a new responsibility except a laudable desire to render better service to the State which honors and trusts them. It is believed with reason, and so far as we know it is not openly disputed, that the proposed amendment would operate to unify and strengthen our educational system. That is the end, and the only end, which its supporters are seeking to accomplish.

MEMORIAL OF TEACHERS.

At the annual meeting in Albany, in July, this year, of the University Convocation, which is composed of the principals of the schools of this State, and was largely attended by them and by eminent educators from other States, they unanimously adopted a memorial to the Constitutional Convention, in which it was requested :

“That among the powers and duties of the Board of Regents shall be the election of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State.”

Extracts from Letters from Prominent Principals of Schools.

"The proposed movement to free our educational system from politics ought to be carried through without fail.

"When every plan is likely to be overturned in three years, when educational officials have to court the favor of political bosses, and when a man's political belief has more power to put him in the office of Superintendent of Public Instruction than his fitness for the position, then it is time to inaugurate a different system.

"The plan to place these matters in the hands of the Regents of the University of the State of New York is the right one; for history has shown that they are working on the right line — that of elevating true education for its own sake and for the sake of the people."

"I cannot understand how any real friend of education can fail to feel a deep interest in the present attempt to unify the school system of this State, through the Constitutional Convention now in session, by placing the whole system under the supervision of the Regents of the University. If there were no other reason for giving the Regents the power to appoint the State Superintendent than the fact that it would effectually take the office out of politics, that alone would be sufficient. But the rapid development and high standard of excellence attained by the secondary schools under the wise supervision of the Regents warrants the belief that the elementary schools would be immeasurably benefited, if placed under the same supervision."

"If for no other or higher than political reasons, hedge our schools, elementary and secondary, round about with ever possible protection against political influences, from the highest position of Superintendent of Public Instruction to the lowest, if possible. Place us under educated and educational men and not partisan politicians. Divorce partisan politics from all educational interests as far as practicable. Away with the dual system; a dual system is necessarily weak on account of conflict and friction. Harmonize the two departments of education in this State, not by abolishing or placing the Regents of the University of the State of New York under the control of the Department of Public Instruction, which would be a surrender to partisan political influences, but, combine the whole State system of elementary and secondary schools, by placing all under the fostering care of the University and giving the latter the control and power of appointment necessary to accomplish this purification. I believe that there would at once be a radical advance and improvement in the elementary schools."

THE REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY WERE THE ORIGINATORS OF OUR PUBLIC COMMON SCHOOLS.

“For the initial and the decisive step which led to a State system of elementary schools, we are primarily indebted to the Regents of the University. In their annual report to the legislature in 1793, 1794 and 1795 they urgently represent the necessity of State action for the organization of a general system of elementary schools. They were the foremost men in the State and they were the custodians of the educational interests of the commonwealth. This gave them the right to speak and it gained attention to what they said. And they spoke earnestly, forcefully and effectively. What they said brought from the legislature of 1795 the great statute whose approaching centennial anniversary has suggested this address.” — [HON. ANDREW S. DRAPER, LL. D., in address at the University Convocation, Albany, N. Y., July 6, 1894.]

And there is abundant evidence that the Regents to-day, as they ever have done, clearly recognize the supreme importance of fostering our common schools. Make them responsible for the character of the work done in that educational field, as they would be if they were to select the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the progress and improvement in the elementary schools of the State would be as marked as has been the development of the secondary schools, with whose care the Regents have been especially charged.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION SHOULD VEST THE APPOINTMENT OF THE SUPER-
INTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION IN THE REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF
THE STATE OF NEW YORK, FOR THE FOLLOWING, AMONG OTHER REASONS:

I.

Because the regents are a continuous body, laboring constantly in the field of public education, and dealing with the subject from a scientific point of view. Chosen primarily because of attained prominence as high-minded and capable men, their official experience gives them personally, and their board traditionally, an expert ability to judge more accurately concerning the natural and acquired fitness of candidates for so important an educational office as that of superintendent of public instruction.

II.

The independent action of the regents, free from harmful outside influences or constraints, is assured by the tenure of their office, which is for life—or rather during continued capacity and faithful attendance upon their duties; and as they receive no compensation for their services, it must be obvious that, as a rule, the position would be accepted only by men whose guiding motive is a sincere desire to promote the public welfare.

III.

The educational system of the state should be kept free from the contaminating influence of partisan politics.

That only can be assured by taking the appointment of educational administrative officers out of the field of such political contention.

As now selected, the choice of superintendent of public instruction is invariably dictated by partisan political considerations, which must naturally impose hindering constraints upon his administration of the office; and (of equal ill consequence) no matter what useful expert efficiency such an official may acquire or develop in office, experience has demonstrated that he will be required to retire therefrom and give place to some new and untried man, when another political party comes into power.

IV.

There is no administrative position in the government of this state which affords greater opportunity for far-reaching public usefulness than that which supervises and guides the instruction of the rising generation. It should have the services of the most capable of men.

But under the present method of choosing the superintendent of public instruction, men of the most desirable qualities cannot well hope to compete successfully for appointment to that office—could hardly be induced to seek the same, or to undertake its duties, knowing so well that scientific and conscientious devotion thereto would avail but little toward their retention in such official position.

V.

Their willing and vast expenditures therefor attest the deep and earnest interest of the people of this state in the cause of public education. They will be quick to approve any measure that promises to increase the efficiency of our educational agencies, and will not hesitate to commend and vote to sustain the Constitutional Convention if it shall take action so clearly for the welfare of the children of the state as that herein suggested.



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